



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policy ID: Human Resources
Subject: Tuition Assistance Program
Creation Date: February 5, 1985
Revision Date: July 31, 2013
Prepared By: Human Resources Department
Approved By: Sylvia Firth
Legal Review Date: July 31, 2013

DESCRIPTION: Tuition Assistance Policy

Policy:

It is the policy of the City of El Paso to encourage employees' development and excellence of performance by sharing costs of approved courses and educational programs.

- A. Assistance is available to employees who have successfully completed courses that are related to either their current position or to a position or career with the City of El Paso. The courses may be for a degree or certificate from a nationally accredited college, university, trade school or technical institution. Professional organizations that grant certificates or licensing may also be considered on an individual basis as recommended by the employee's department director. Required sitting fees for examinations leading to certifications and Internet courses may be included under this program. All courses and certifications are subject to approval by the Human Resources Director.
- B. Seminars, conferences and other courses that are a requirement of the employee's department are not eligible for tuition assistance. These courses are the responsibility of the employee's respective department or the individual, or both.
- C. Fulltime/part-time employees may enroll in the Tuition Assistance Program upon completion of six (6) months of continuous service with the City of El Paso.
- D. The Tuition Assistance Program will advance or reimburse 80% of the mandatory tuition/fees for courses taken during the fiscal year. These charges will not exceed specified fees at the University of Texas at El Paso. Part-time employees will be eligible for assistance at a pro-rated amount based on the number of hours worked per week.

The Tuition Assistance Program may be used to pay for instructional expenses of the City's Supervisory Academy.

Certificate and licensing courses will be advanced or reimbursed at the total cost of the course, up to a maximum of \$1000 per employee each fiscal year.

Total employee assistance per fiscal year, may not exceed the amount of advancement/reimbursement for 5 academic courses (15 credit hours).

Expenses that will not be eligible for assistance include, but are not limited to the following: *Cost of living expenses, textbooks, equipment, materials, tests, travel, late registration fees and parking.*

- E. Assistance is limited to two (2) academic courses per semester and a maximum of five (5) courses (15 credit hours) per fiscal year.
- F. Courses taken for academic credit must be successfully completed as evidence by a transcript or grade report indicating a grade of "C" or better. Graduate level courses must be completed with a "B" or better. If a course is non-graded, documentation of satisfactory performance or a passing grade must be submitted. Grades of "I" (Incomplete) can be reimbursed if completed within the time frame established by the college or university attending.

Courses leading to certification or licensing must be evidenced with official documentation supporting successful completion.

- G. Tuition Assistance Program funds will not be used to grant educational leaves without pay nor will benefits be available to employees on leave without pay status.
- H. For employees receiving financial assistance from the Veteran's Administration, scholarships, grants or any other sources (not to include loans), the tuition assistance amount will be calculated at the applicable rate of the cost not covered by financial assistance.
- I. If courses are available both during and after regular working hours, the employee shall attend the course offered after regular working hours. If the only course available is during work, however, the Department Director **MAY** reschedule the employee's work hours to compensate for the time lost from work to attend the course or adjust the employee's pay accordingly.
- J. Funds will be distributed on a first-come-first-served basis depending on fiscal year funding availability.
- K. Employees who drop or fail a course after receiving tuition assistance for that course, shall repay the amount in four (4) equal payments.

Employees who leave the City service, except for non-voluntary military assignment, prior to completing coursework will forfeit their right to assistance/reimbursement.

Employees who voluntarily resign to work for any local public institution or governmental entity shall not be

required to repay tuition assistance. Employees who voluntarily resign to complete education requirements for which the City cannot offer a flex schedule shall not be required to repay tuition assistance.

Any employee who receives tuition assistance and leaves City employment due to voluntary resignation or involuntary termination shall repay the City the full amount of the reimbursement paid to him/her within one year prior to the effective date of separation. The employee shall pay back said amount in the form of payroll deduction, personal check, money order or any other form or repayment acceptable to the City.

- L. Texas Exemption Programs. The Texas Legislature passed the Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 54.208 and Section 54.2081 in 2009 to exempt firefighters and peace officers enrolled in certain courses. Firefighters enrolled in fire science courses shall be exempt from paying tuition and laboratory fees. Peace officers enrolled in a course or courses offered as part of a criminal justice or law enforcement management-related curriculum shall be exempt from paying tuition and laboratory fees. This Act has been amended in 2009, 2011 and 2012. Courses not directly related to law enforcement, criminal justice or fire science, even though required for completion of a certificate or degree, may be eligible for tuition assistance under the City of El Paso Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). Police officers and firefighters are encouraged to qualify for assistance under this exemption.

- M. This policy becomes effective July 31, 2013 and supersedes all previous Tuition Assistance Program policy and procedures.

Procedures

A. Committee

1. The Tuition Assistance Program Committee will be composed of:
 - a) The City Manager or designee,
 - b) The Human Resources Director or designee,
 - c) Other member agreed to by the above.
2. The TAP Committee will meet when necessary to review the program and the consistency with which the program's established policies and procedures are administered.
3. The TAP Committee shall hear appeals regarding tuition matters submitted by the employees and shall render final decisions on those appeals in accordance with the policy and procedures.
4. The TAP Committee reserves the right to suspend or restrict tuition assistance based upon the availability of funds.
5. The TAP Committee may reduce the number of credit hours/classes and percentage rates should the assistance exceed the availability of funds.

B. Procedures for Filing TAP Application

1. In order to participate in the program, an employee must complete and submit a "TAP" application to the Human Resources Department. An up-to-date transcript and a current degree plan must accompany applications for assistance for academic courses completed at a university or college. This is a one-time application, except as required when major changes to the TAP Policy occur.
2. Applications for certificates or licensing must be accompanied by information on the seminar; workshop or licensing program the employee is attending. Applications must have a recommendation by the employee's department director and must be submitted each time the employee is seeking assistance.

C. Approval

1. The Human Resources Director will on behalf of the TAP Committee approve the authorized assistance in accordance with the policy and procedures.
2. A "course approval" form is required for each reimbursement request. Request for advance payment/reimbursement must be submitted at least 15 days prior to the start of the course (s). Forms are available in the Human Resources Department, Organizational Development Division.

D. Payment

1. Employees may request assistance to pay for tuition and fees in the form of an early payment by completing the appropriate form available at the Human Resources Department, Organizational Development Division. Assistance must be requested in person with an itemized bill and a class schedule. Employees must agree to the terms and conditions prior to receiving funds.
2. An itemized receipt of payment and an official grade report (or documentation of successful completion for certificates or licensing programs) must be submitted to the Human Resources Department within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the completion of the course in order to process reimbursement payments.
3. Assistance will be issued to employees through the City's account payable check process. Checks will be directly deposited to the employee's assigned bank account.

APPROVED BY:



Joyce Wilson, City Manager

7/31/13

Date